



Degrees Without Boundaries

Appropriations Committee

Testimony by

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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ed Klonoski and I am President of Charter Oak College and Executive Director of the BSAA, which includes the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium. I have with me today, Dr. Diane Goldsmith who is Executive Director of the CTDLC, Cliff Williams who is the CFAO for the BSAA, and Dr. Shirley Adams, Provost of Charter Oak State College.

We have two issues before us that I would like to address, and I would like to address them in terms of the RBA report that the College recently delivered. During that discussion, we answered questions about the efficacy of our online program, and that discussion was perfectly focused on our institutional mission. Our response to the current challenges is anchored in the planning that we presented in our RBA report.

To begin, the College welcomes the governor's focus on creating a strategic plan for public higher education, and we look forward to helping produce a set of institutional measures that set our work in the context of student learning and the state's strategic higher education needs. The Governor's focus on jobs in this economy is absolutely right, and we believe our role is to be the gateway for Returning Adult students. This has always been our mission, and our recent RBA report indicates the success we have had at meeting it.

In addition, look forward to working with the Board of Regents through which we will report our budgetary and assessment results. From what we could glean from our reading of Governor's Bill 1011, that Board will be tasked with creating the strategic plan for public higher education and then measuring our progress toward meeting it. Again, both the creation of a plan and institutional measures of progress are necessary both at the state level and at the federal level.

If we have concerns, they are about the details of the new organizational structure, the particular institutional goals that get created, and how 17 institutions will report to a single board without creating a traffic jam. But we are confident that Charter Oak and our sister colleges and universities are up to the task of supporting the functions of the Board, and assisting its new President with his or her duties. If our institutional missions are the starting point for planning, Charter Oak will be fine.

The second question is the budget reductions. The Secretary of OPM is correct when he states that this 10% reduction is actually a 2-3% reduction of our total budget. That is true because the College receives only approximately 25% of its budget from our state allotment. We earn the rest. And we earn those dollars while providing the lowest cost baccalaureate in the state. So while no budget reduction is a positive thing, we fully understand why the state has the issues it does, and we stand ready to shoulder our fair share of the pain. On that same front, we are grateful that our financial aid dollars have been preserved in the Governor's budget.

Let me assure you that the budget reduction will not produce the elimination of our program or our services. Instead, it will delay our ability to produce new programs, it will require that we look carefully at programs and activities that do not "stand on their own bottom," and it may require a modest increase in our fees. We will continue to hold the line on staff growth, except in the area of instruction.

I will tell you now what I will tell the Board of Regents when it is created. Charter Oak has the mission, the educational delivery mechanisms, and the flexibility to do even more in the arena of Returning Adult students than we do now. Annually, we serve over 3,000 students and our degree seeking enrollment has increased 10% in the past year. We have increased our six year graduation rate in the past year from an all time high of 58% to an even higher 63%. That rate is consistent across our minority populations, and it is actually higher in our high risk populations, as represented by the WIT and CT/Wage programs.

We are actively working to increase the number and workforce value of our programs. As you know from our previous appearances, we offer such workforce programs as our Nurse Refresher that at put 243 nurses back to work, our Early Childhood degree completion that has graduated 100 students over the past five years, and our Public Safety concentration that counts 9 municipal police chiefs among its graduates. On a broader level, the CT DOL reports that in 2009 our students increased their weekly salaries by \$404 after the completion of the degree. This is a powerful indicator of our employee and workforce development success.

We are ready to launch our first Master's degree, and we already have a waiting list of interested students. That program will include a core focused on non-profit management, which is absolutely critical at this difficult moment for the state and the nation's non-profits. We have also done our first market research into the state's programmatic needs, and identified a bachelor's program in Health Information Management as our next target program. Of course, these programmatic developments require that the College invest in order to build, and that ability is challenged by the 10% reduction on our state allotment.

The good news is that the College has done well over the past several years to increase its efficiencies at serving an increasing student population, keeping the staff headcount level (except for a slight increase around student service and instruction), and investing where possible in technologies that will add flexibility to our resource allocation. We have increased technology driven student self-service, grown our distance learning enrollments and their associated revenue stream, re-designed parts of the curriculum to increase student success, and most recently, re-designed our fee structure to make enrollment easier (a revenue neutral re-structuring).

Those are precisely the rights sorts of improvements for the College to be making, and they will serve our students well. They indicate that we have worked hard to shelter current students from any negative effects from the budget reduction.

That is the good news. The bad news is that the budget reductions may make the next set of such improvements difficult. For us, reductions in our state support threaten our creativity. In other words, the College has plans for new programs that were chosen through a market research process that identified key growth areas in Connecticut that required a bachelors degree. We are eager to bring these programs forward. We also continue to scan the technology environment for new ways to provide academic support to our students. But as we minimize budget reductions by controlling costs, which will work in the short term, the long term risk is that it reduces are ability to innovate.

Additionally, our innovation efforts are dependent on the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium being a healthy and vibrant organization. The College, as do many other institutions, relies on many of the CTDLC's services in order to meet our students' needs in a cost effective manner.

Diane Goldsmith will give you a description of the CTDLC circumstance and then we would be happy to answer your questions.

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